

## From Spatial Analysis, to Virtual Wonder

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Formerly we used to represent things visible on earth, things we either liked to look at or would have liked to see. Today we reveal the reality that is behind visible things, thus expressing the belief that the visible world is merely an isolated case in relation to the universe and that there are many more other latent realities. (Paul Klee, 1920)

During the last twenty years, the crisis of representation has influenced our favorite support of expression: books and films (Clifford 1988; Hall 1997; Marcus and Fisher 1986; Turner 1991; Tyler 1986). The world's political context and our need for a self-reflexive attitude toward our own practice emerged as a possible causality. Even if this questioning was inevitable and necessary for the improvement of our methods, to contextualize our practice, and to offer testimony as a cultural or group go-between, the way in which we perceive and present the real remains a challenge.

Digital technologies question our perception of the real, from a philosophical, scientific, epistemological, artistic, and religious point of view (DeLanda 2002; Deleuze 1985; Foerst 2004; Herzfeld 2002, Latour 1998; Levy 1998; Stafford 1999; Rajah 1998; Ascott 2003). As the notion of reality and its virtual dimension is questioned, we are forced to interrogate the way new technologies are changing our perception of the world.

Regarding the digital, anthropological publications focus primarily on different strategies of analysis and representation using new technologies such as hypertextuality, hypermedia, and CD-ROMs (Anderson 1998; Biella 1993; Rodowick 1994; Seaman and Williams 1992), and on the repercussions of new publication and diffusion methods, such as the internet, for our anthropological work. But rarely is research undertaken into the use of digital technologies as tools of experimentation and theorization.

Virtual experimentation in science, enables one to see objects or realities which would otherwise be inaccessible, yet very few researchers have looked at the possibilities of using digital techniques for creating new modes of observation in anthropology, or new ways of translating our visual data, which would give access to the immaterial dimension we face in our daily practice. This contrary to what has become quite common in, for example, archaeology and that discipline's frequent use of interactive technology.

As a visual anthropologist, using Super-8, 8mm, 16mm, Hi-8, and then leaving the editing table for Final Cut Pro, I was particularly concerned with integrating the digital, not just in its technical but also in its conceptual dimension. I started to work on the virtual dimension of our reality, even if at first it could seem heretic, because as visual anthropologist I was sup-

posed to focus on fragmented pieces captured from the real.

Beyond this personal concern, two conferences I organized in Paris, underline the limitation of our mean of expression or means of representation. In 2000, for example, sixty films made among the Dogon from 1920 until today were screened at the Musée de l'Homme, most of them providing a brilliant picture of our own Western interest (Wanono 1998).

While film has been the chosen tool of anthropological and ethnological filmmakers eager to study rituals and their manifestations, one must admit that the treatment of the emotion, essential to these rituals, has not been the focus of many filmed documents. The emotions of participants and of the film directors behind the cameras have often been avoided and not mentioned.

Convinced by the unique quality of the material collected over a period of twenty years among the Dogon, I wished to translate it into an appropriate shape. Our means of representation – lens, screen, and book – are shaped identically to facilitate the translation from one to another as if whatever the content was, the final stage of translation has to be identical.

If I referred to McLuhan's well-known quotation, 'the medium is the message', why did we not modify our tools to create an appropriate message? Or why do we rely mainly on the language capacity to present our personal encounter? Have we seen just what we could describe with the tools offered?

The presentation I made in Leiden in 1999, on which this chapter is based, centred on the question of the *mise en scène* and the spatial description of a ritual context, and intended to provide a perfect example of the difficulties encountered by a visual anthropologist. I have chosen to keep the presentation more or less in its original format and then extend my explanations in order to clarify my position. The difficulties encountered were not just experienced at a personal level but reflected some contradictions in our practice.

I will reposition my work more specifically into its historical and academic context, and will offer some insight on visual anthropology as a tool and a method of describing and evoking specific events, from a personal or a theoretical point of view. Finally, in the conclusion, I expand the debate by explaining my shift towards the use of new media in relation to the publication of field data. In doing so, I hope, I will answer some of the questions raised by Luning (see this volume p. \*\*\*) regarding the difference between written anthropology and filmic anthropology and the different means of creating representations of cultural or religious manifestations.

### **Working among the Dogon, and the 'Griaule school'**

When, influenced by Jean Rouch, I made my first film in the Dogon country, in 1977, I obviously did not realize how the historical context of research on the Dogon would influence my personal approach. As mentioned by Clifford (1998), the ethnographic contribution made by

the 'Griaule school', which is often not properly defined and presented, was questionable. The main arguments against the 'school' were constructed around the influence of the colonization period, the method employed and subsequently the interpretation offered. These widely accepted arguments, gave some kind of legacy to the next generations of anthropologists to ignore or even to vehemently critique the literature produced during this period.

Interestingly, the more I observed the organization of such arguments, the more I realized it was a common practice in all areas of our profession; the 'Griaule school' was not the only target. To be able to be recognized as part of an academic community, we are invited to follow the same kind of initiation; constructing a strong argument with the new theory in practice, against the preceding approach.

When I started to record data concerning women and daily life among the Dogon, the idea of giving an interpretation appeared almost disconcerting because Germaine Dieterlen, most of the time, gave her personal analysis of my recorded material. I seemed to be squeezed between a contradictory explanation and a polite silence. In both cases, I was wrong.

The only advantage I took from this paralyzing situation was my inability to become part of any specific school, and to realize that the organization of arguments was the core of our work. Schools of interpretation were fighting, symbolically killing the most prestigious personalities of our field with the 'clean conscience' of being politically correct!

The position of the Dogon country is highly significant in our mediated world. Between 1933 and 2003, a period covering seventy years, the Dogon's myth became the myth of the Dogon. Our western society appropriates the beliefs and the 'reality' of this specific population to fulfill its dream for the lost paradise.

Staying regularly in Dogon country, in the Ogoeye district of the town of Sangha, a magnet for tourists, journalists, politicians and travel guides, I was therefore in a good place to observe the gradual rise of tourism, the appearance of antique dealers, and the frequent guided tours of the 'Griaule House' as a living museum. I became an object of curiosity on a par with the Dogon. On seeing a living representative of the 'Griaule school', the tourists could hardly suppress their desire to 'take a snapshot'. Was I a stuffed ethnologist or even an ethnologised ethnologist? It became quite difficult, given these conditions, to ignore the mirror effect.

Conscious of the limitations, the possible interpretation, re-appropriation of the ethnographic material, I decided to concentrate my research on the different forms of *mise en scène* instead of proposing new interpretations. I have always seen my position as visual anthropologist as a cultural go-between, adding some new richness to the world's patrimony, just adding some immanence to our human condition. In other words, quoting Crawford, I was subscribing to a notion of observational cinema that, As MacDougall expresses it, shows 'a stance of humility before the world' (Crawford 1992, p. 73).

This is probably why I stayed in suspense, in between, keeping in mind all the possible interpretations, and all the possible levels of reality, caught by the ritual I participated in. At some point, I experienced the opposition proposed by Bourdieu (2001) the experience that participants of a particular social world have of it is neither available nor describable without ceasing to experience it as a participant. The knowledge acquired during this observational process creates the subject for research and discourse and has no other relationship to theoretical or anthropological knowledge either as a goal or a method. Choosing to concentrate on the filmic construction does not save me from this implacable and violent separation but pushes me to find new ways of expression.

### **Filming a Dogon ritual: the background**

The film I presented in Leiden, *A l'Ombre du Soleil, Funérailles et Intronisation du Hogon d'Arou*, was made after fifteen years of fieldwork among the Dogon, continuous travel between France and Mali, and extensive shooting and feedback experiences over that period.

In 1992, a TV producer asked me to make a film about a ritual which had never been directly observed by an ethnographer (extremely unusual in the world of Dogon ethnography!). Although during the shooting, we were neither constrained in our work by the producers nor the production process, while editing we started to realize more clearly the difficulties of presenting such a complex ritual for a wide audience. We had thirteen hours of rushes, shot over a two-month period. Until the end of the editing process we did not know for sure how long the final version would be. The commentary was a key point. In the end, the broadcast version was 1h20. In addition, we kept a long version of 3h40, which we screened several times for our colleagues and which we considered to be our ethnographic filmic work of reference.

By referring to Howard Morphy's (1993) analysis on the interrelationships between anthropological research, shooting and editing, Luning (see this volume) prompts me to clarify our position. Even if we managed to convince the producer to start our mission ten days prior to the shooting, the information, collected before the ritual started, was almost contradictory. As soon as we started recording, day and night, the events as they unfolded in front of us, we gathered correct information from a few minutes to a few hours prior to the next step in the ritual. At some point, the construction described by Morphy was, in our case, not completely appropriate because the research period, the scriptwriting period, and the whole pre-conceptualization of the film prior to the shooting was done simultaneously. It does not mean that I therefore underestimate the construction process that precedes any action of representation. The directing decisions applied during filming were often expunged from the final version and I wanted to perform an auto-analysis of our decision-making during the shooting and editing in order to give a more contextualized vision of what the spectators were looking at. This is why, during the conference in Leiden, my goal was neither to analyze the *mise en scène*

of the ritual's space from an anthropological point of view nor to give an anthropological interpretation of the space of the ritual illustrated by the film's sequences. Instead I tried to find a way of translating the filmic choices made during the shooting and the editing of the film into words. It was both a research enterprise and a stylistic exercise, attempting to find accurate concepts relating specifically to our field of visual anthropology.

This attempt can be summarized as a reflexive one. In Ruby's words it is a matter of '... an explicit description of the methodology used to collect, to analyze and to organize the data for presentation ...what is important is the absolute scientific necessity for making method public' (Ruby 1980 ). If the 'scientific necessity' was not the main concern for presenting this self-reflexive analysis, to underline the opposition, contradiction that occurs between shooting, editing, and our anthropological context was an essential goal. The comments made by Sabine Luning during the conference (see Luning, this volume, p. \*\*\*) focused solely on the commentary and on what she perceived to be the weaknesses of our work in relation to her anthropological approach of space in Mossi culture.

Our commentary was reduced to a minimum because we had not finished our ethnographic research enough to give precise and valuable explanations and interpretations of this very complex ritual, and also because we are convinced that it is not by an omnipotent commentary (the so-called 'voice of God') that the 'ordinary viewer' gains access to the deeper dimensions of such a ceremony. The term 'ordinary viewer' is an expression that describes a mythical appreciation of viewers by a producer, based on an ideological presentation of the viewing public, with which I disagree completely.

From Luning's perspective, proposing an analysis of our *mise en scène* without specifically taking into account the anthropological interpretation of it, produces some kind of contradiction or even some misunderstanding. The contradiction arises from the idea that a verbal commentary could transmit the value of such a specific relation to the space. As Luning puts it, when friends of hers look at a postcard of a Mossi palace, people see a cluster of mud, which lacked the impression of magnitude (Luning, this volume, p. \*\*\*). The subtitle, whatever its format, remains impotent in transmitting the sacred character of this specific building. To extend this idea, how can we communicate the Mossi people's respect for such space? Especially when we have accessed it, not just by acquiring ethnographic knowledge, but by intimate relationships, personal encounters, stories, and memories related to this particular shape of mud.

We deliberately chose to use pertinent concepts with regard to our own practice and to free ourselves, for a while, from anthropological terminology in the strict sense. As MacDougall puts it, 'Disciplines tend to grove to fit the niches of greatest opportunity and least expressive difficulty. They also tend to define themselves in opposition to what they are not, thus sealing

themselves against some forms of change' (MacDougall 1998)

I chose concepts provided by Claudine de France (1982) and by the FRC researcher, Jun Sato (1991), even though his analysis was not specifically based on a religious ritual space. One of de France's aims is to introduce moving images as a research tool for the human sciences (especially in ethnographic film, but in fact her work can be applied to documentary in general). She is certainly not the first, nor the only, person to attempt this. Other researchers have tried to use film in the same way. However, we must emphasize, virtually no one has tackled moving images as a tool in themselves, in the way she does. Others have mostly called on outside disciplines at the same time; working with moving images alongside linguistics, psychoanalysis or sociology. None of these various attempts have resulted in any significant achievements.

Although inspired by existing outside disciplines, with a whole mechanism of concepts and notions, de France preferred to focus solely on moving images, in order to have a genuine filmic anthropology, i.e. an anthropology of moving images. Her techniques can be compared to those of Ferdinand de Saussure in linguistics. As we all know, he started with the analysis of sounds, i.e. the acoustic phenomena of speech, to then develop concepts based on the specific material of oral communication. Thus the study of linguistics was born. In the same way, de France started with visual material, filmic data, without trying to apply to moving images the results of other scientific disciplines.

Starting with visual material necessarily entails not only studying the meaning and content of the recorded material (behaviour, actions, gestures or any visual manifestations which can be recorded), but also thinking about how to try and give an account described in visual terms. In this way, the filmic capturing of activities depends on the filmmaker's use of 'tools', i.e. cinematographic elements.

The general idea is that everything in the film is a 'procedure', or, more precisely, a combination of cinematographic 'procedures'. We made decisions whether to film in a close-up or a wide shot, what camera angle to choose, whether to move the camera (panning and tracking shots) or keep it static, whether to use long takes or short ones, what to include in an edit decision, etc. All of these choices result from a combination of specific 'procedures'. In other words, everything that is shown is the consequence of choices made by the filmmaker and by necessity a *mise en scène*. Thus a 'rhetoric' appears, a repertory of cinematographic 'procedures' that the filmmaker freely uses to record, according to her own point of view, any activity.

One of the first tasks that this rhetoric assigns to the moving image is to be a means of description. Actually, better than writing, moving images are in a position to show the continuity of the filmed event and, for example, the simultaneity of some of its aspects within this context. The introduction of moving images as a means of research in the human sciences has,

consequently, modified the relationship between 'immediate observation', 'delayed observation', and 'language'.

Claudine de France's research has spread into two inseparable directions; one which brings out the content of moving images, a content that cannot be appreciated without becoming aware of the filmic methods, which have brought it into the consciousness of the viewer (filmic anthropology); the other which seeks to make use of cinematographic 'procedures' (the *mise en scène*) and understand the ways in which these filmic procedures are used.

In 1987, de France published an article about the addressee spectator of the ritual and its *mise en scène* in ethnographic film. As she explained after viewing and analyzing many feature films, ethnographic films and especially those of Jean Rouch, she developed the notion of a *destinataire invisible* [invisible addressee or observer] to explore the different possibilities for the filmmaker trying to place such a *destinataire invisible* in the frame (de France 1987).

For several years now, filmmakers dealing with ritual and representation, where the sacred dimension is an integral part of the action, have been pleased to find such terminology but it was only a couple of years ago that a few anthropologists, such as M. Cartry, have paid close attention to this new terminology and how its use could be extended to ethnological practice. 'Auto *mise en scène*' follows the same path. Now almost all visual anthropologists, at least working in Europe, are familiar with this concept.

To convey the wealth and astonishing complexity of this ritual, it is the filmmaker's duty to choose a meticulous method of description, allowing her on the one hand to capture the various phases of the rite (e.g. preliminary, prefatory and post-factory phases) and, on the other hand, a guiding principle with which to record all the actions and elements that make up the rite. This task is all the more difficult because the filmmaker is soon confronted with the most cumbersome effects of the law of obstruction (or exclusion) inherent in any observational process. The studies of rites and their filmic representation have led me to take particular interest in one of the main components of the ritual action, that of space.

Space can be viewed as a simple holder of the event, used primarily as a guideline for the filmic portrayal. The difficulty the filmmaker experiences in representing space brings us to focus on the various ways that space can be staged within the film. Repeated viewings of filmic portrayals of rites reveal that the visible or invisible observer, at whom the ritual is aimed, influences the agent's actions. That is why the filmmaker can only discover the ceremonial space as the ritual activities unfold (for example a prayer said in silence in front of a drum forces the filmmaker to show the space where the drum leads and therefore film a closer shot).

We note that the ritual agent's demarcation of space is not only a permanent feature in the organization of the great ceremonial groupings, but that it also forms an essential phase without which the rite cannot begin (in our case, on the first day, women retrace the mythic

creation space of Arou and the surrounding region as an initial premise of the ritual). The filmmaker should take great care in how she positions the camera during filming of such events, in order to give the audience a real understanding of the space.

In prioritizing the strict observance of the protagonist's own staging, the filmmaker does not begin to solve the problems which inevitably occur in trying to accurately convey the many dimensions that the ritual space can take on. The various film tactics used by the director during filming may well be jettisoned in the final edit due to production constraints. Editing tools such as the inclusion of maps, diagrams and so on, do not seem appropriate. When the viewer's eye goes from the diagram to the filmed action, more often than not she has lost her reference point within the shot.

### **Filming In the Shadow of the Sun**

The straightforward description of ritual events tends to be given priority over shots or frames showing the spatial continuum. Descriptions of the action are usually chosen over shots/frames describing spatial continuity. Viewing and systematically comparing the rushes with the edited film shows that the narrative dimension is preferred over the descriptive dimension by some producers and directors and in general also by visual anthropologists.

We have chosen to study specific forms of the representation of space from the short version of the film *In the Shadow of the Sun*, *Funeral and Enthronement of the Hogon*. This documentary shows the funeral of a traditional Dogon chief, a Hogon, followed by the enthronement of his successor.

Two questions should be added at this point. Are we supposed to produce a terminology without any direct relation to the glossary of anthropology? Is it really a non-sense to refer to a terminology, which has been created outside the world of the anthropology of ritual?

Plate 12.1 The women retrace the mythical space of Arou as an initial premise of the ritual. (Video-frame from *In the Shadow of the Sun*, *Funeral and Enthronement of the Hogon*.)

Jun Sato's research, discussed in his book *De l'Espace à l'Ecran* (1991), was the starting point of our work. The author divides filmic space into two categories: 'protagonist space' and 'pragmatic space'. Space as protagonist is when it is the main object of the cinematic description. Pragmatic space is when space is seen incidentally through filmed action. In some types of *mise en scène*, these two kinds of space can be presented either simultaneously or successively in the frame. I will illustrate my analysis with some examples from our film:

Protagonist space:

The first two shots of the film let the spectator discover the Bandiagara cliffs, a huge wall of



boulders, 200 kilometers long and 200 meters high in the middle of a semi-desert landscape. The images are underscored by the sound of the wind. The soundtrack and the images together aim to convey the specific situation of the Dogon country, at the border of the desert.

Plate 12.2. Landscape (Video-frame  
from *In the Shadow of the Sun*, Funeral  
and Enthronement of the Hogon.)

These first images were shot after the main filming was over, to give the spectators a general view of the space of the ritual (Film-fragment: Wanono 1).

In any case, the ritual actions would give the spectator a descriptive view of the space. As the portrayal of the landscape continues, the sound of the wind fades out smoothly and is replaced by a commentary giving general information on the history and general organization of the Dogon country. So the picture is being used to convey information from another register. In regard to Luning's observation, I should explain that we chose this empty space because we knew this film would be broadcast on TV. There might be written information superimposed on these images, and we preferred to shoot stones rather than people to be used as credit support. However, it is also true that this cliff is the stereotype of the Dogon landscape, which underlies so many misunderstandings of this culture. In our case, we filmed it in order to have some footage for the credit sequence and to give an idea of the localization of the Dogon country in relation to the desert.

Later on in the film, we choose to use space as a guideline for description. During the enthronement, the future Hogon must go into retreat for fifteen days in a grotto. However, we did not have permission to enter this space at that time. So the film crew decided to shoot the grotto when it was empty and access was permitted (Film-fragment: Wanono 2).

During the editing of the enthronement sequence these pictures are used to let the spectator discover the space of the retreat. The empty grotto permits us to evoke this mythical time, as space without any action could be the best way to express the dimension of timelessness. From Luning's anthropological viewpoint this appears as a misinterpretation, but from a filmic perspective this decision 'works', it conveys the appropriate information in a meaningful way.

Furthermore, explaining as precisely as we could the way we chose our *mise en scène* during the shooting and editing was part of our interest in this project. I remember clearly the

Plate 12.3. Grotto (Video-frame from  
*In the Shadow of the Sun*, Funeral and  
Enthronement of the Hogon.)

explanations we received from the guardian of the grotto, and we were quite aware of the importance of this particular place. But we also knew it would be impossible for us to describe the interior as soon as the Hogon had completed his retreat or to give a full meaning of the

grotto during a screening for a TV audience.

By focusing on this example, I tried to restore the essence of the moment standing in front of this space, camera on the shoulder, and to spend this minute in slow motion; to translate into words the decision to film a space outside the continuity of the ritual. It was a cinematographic choice not an anthropological one. Why should it not be permissible for a filmmaker to use a cinematographic process and explain it for what it is; a cinematographic choice within an anthropological process?

These examples are given to underline that the filmmaker must always choose a strategy to figure out the space, regardless of the specific temporal events of the ritual. So even if our analytical tools only let us see the space in its filmic characteristics, we are fully aware of the key role played by space in the organization of a ritual. The analysis of the long version of the film shows that each ritual sequence appropriates a new space, sometimes using narration to restate or reinvent the values attached to this new space (songs of the women moving along the Sogo on the first day (Film-fragment: Wanono 3), prayer of the Griot in front of the drum (Film-fragment: Wanono 4), prayers and cries of the smiths with the Saba (Film-fragment: Wanono 5).

Plate 12.4. Each ritual sequence appropriates a new space; prayer of the Griot in front of the drum. (Video-frame from In the Shadow of the Sun, Funeral and Enthronement of the Hogon.)

During the first night of the funerals, a figure representing the Hogon is placed on a rock. The following morning, the spectators discover the Hogon's effigy and listen to animal calls. The description of space is used as a temporal transition between the first and second day of the ritual. This transition is underlined by a commentary telling us, "The following morning" (Film-fragment: Wanono 6). In this last example, a pause in the action enables space to become the protagonist.

One shot in the film illustrates a transition between protagonist space and pragmatic space. At the beginning of the film, after the shots of the Bandiagara cliffs, the first participants cross the landscape and climb up to the Hogon's sanctuary. The camera follows them. From a wide angle of the cliffs we move onto a camera movement, which accompanies the protagonist-actors (Film-fragment: Wanono 7). Space becomes pragmatic. It is through movement, people climbing, that we are able to discover space.

A descriptive strategy leads us to use action instead of space as the leading principle. The staging choices that were made during shooting were not necessarily taken into account in the

edit. The television broadcast of the short version of the film forced the producer to impose constraints on the descriptive strategy.

Sometimes, space is seen incidentally in the background of filmed actions. On the rock, two priests are building a platform of clay. During the filming this sequence was built up around a succession of shots showing the rock and its position in relation to the plaza and the actions around it. The editing of this sequence is based on the continuity of the action and not on the description of the space. Thus, the spectator is not able to get a sense of the position of the rock in the ritual space or the platform on the rock (Film-fragment: Wanono 8).

However, we can cite examples where following the action enables the viewer to intuitively understand the pragmatic space. For instance, on the second day of the burial ritual the sacrifice of a cow has been planned for the early part of the afternoon. The cow is not in Arou, the village where the sacrifice is to take place; it is at the foot of a cliff. Because of the steep slope, the cow could not make it up the side of the cliff on its own. Participants decide to carry the cow up the cliff and all the way to the main square in Arou, where the cow is to be sacrificed. The participants arrive en masse, carrying the cow; shepherds' flutes give a musical accompaniment. The camera follows the groups of men and the men carrying the cow (Film-fragment: Wanono 9). This permits the viewer to intuitively grasp the circular shape of the space. The huge crowd present during this part of the ritual does not allow us to describe the space literally, as it is invisible behind the events which are taking place within it.

Twice in the film the filmmakers underline the circular shape of the plaza, the venue of the ritual action, which cannot be seen. In the afternoon of the third day the griots, keepers of the traditions, enter the main plaza in single file (Film-fragment: Wanono 10). The cameraperson follows them smoothly and the viewer understands clearly the shape of the space.

The law of prolongation of space outside of the framing: the viewer naturally infers that the off screen space is the continuation of the space on screen, and can imagine the off screen elements evoked by the indicators on screen. An example is that after his selection, the future Hogon is carried by several men into a grotto situated a few kilometers from his sanctuary. The filmmaker shows in three shots the distance traveled by the Hogon and his carriers (Film-fragment: Wanono 11). The viewers can internally prolong the space shown and reconstruct for themselves the Hogon's journey.

If the viewer reconstructs the space that is not shown, he or she can also establish the continuity of the actions. In the editing two actions can be successive and space is therefore seen as contiguous. Even if our descriptive strategy had taken into account the organization of space as one of the parameters inherent in the ritual, in the edit we would not have been able to use space as the underlying structure. Frequently, action blurs the perception of space. Action competes with space.

Still, the notion of separation from the interpretative field is in suspense. Can we analyze filmic choice related to a ritual space without reference to its ritual significance? Can we analyze the space from a filmic interpretation and then overlap with an analysis of the ritual? Or, as anthropologists have always insisted, must an ethnographic reading always take precedence over a scenic analysis?

Referring to Latour (1998), the viewer in any case is forced to transcend the setting in which we are immersed to reach the meaning. In front of the spatial representation, the viewer will have to transcend the visual information to reach the religious, mythical dimension of the space described. For Latour, religion has no more to do with belief than science with the visible world: 'The only believers are the ones, immersed in scientific networks, who believed that the others believed in something' (1998, p. 127). This statement gave me insight in regard to my own practice, where I chose to deal with the *mise en scène*, instead of facing the production of an interpretative discourse of elements invisible in the frame.

### **A new open space?**

Convinced and trapped by the contradictions raised by our academic discipline, I thought it was the right time to do research on the way the digital media could open our field. The creative and the genealogical sides of the house never meet, as Barbara Stafford (1999) explained. This is why I oriented my path toward the media and art department. In fact, film as medium is no longer considered as an art practice in the academic structure. At UCSB, Art and Film Studies belong to a separate department, where fiction films are treated, documentary slightly considered and visual anthropology almost completely ignored. The 'new media' department is set apart within art, design or communication schools whose main mission is to teach the evanescent moment (Stafford 1999, p 192).

The contradiction was interesting enough to consider the specificities of an art practice in a digital era or more precisely the role, and the value of visualization in our society.

Latour explained that scientific practices simultaneously fight against the power of images and imagination while providing indefinite sources of representation indispensable to produce objective knowledge. In my practice, as a visual anthropologist, the scientific surroundings accept my data when it reinforces its capacity of producing knowledge and ignores it when the presence of an immaterial dimension was embarrassing. How to treat the invisible, the magical power, the silence, and the different perception of time or even space, without dissolving their specificities into our pre-conceptualized universe? Words, pictures, or queer objects?

The encounter with Marcos Novac during workshops organized at UCSB, gave me insight in regard to digital art as a possibility to create reality with alternative manifestations. Novac created the word 'transvergence' to stimulate this idea of creating a new world by derailing into a new trajectory. He introduced a new trail into his work to describe the epistemological

changes that digital technology has provoked. He sets up tranvergence in opposition to convergence and divergence. The last two notions are 'simple linear extrapolations that proceed by strategies of alignment. Transvergence advances translinearly by tactics of derailment... While convergence and divergence contain the hidden assumption that the true, in either a cultural or an objective sense, is a continuous landmass, tranvergence recognizes true statements to be islands in an alien archipelago, sometimes only accessible by leaps, flights and voyages on vessels of artifice. ... Transvergence, refers to the study and applications of concepts and methods by which convergence of disciplines, media and technologies is seen not as a goal in itself, not as the focal point of a predictable origin for divergences but as an opportunity to speculate and propose novel transdisciplinary epistemological and creative formations. Using willful strategies of derailment, it seeks to promote the mergence of previously unattainable but presently potentially viable species of efforts: future genres, future fields of inquiry, future arts, media and sciences' (Novak, 2004, p.71) If the visual anthropologist, facing the task of translating visual data into words, tries to translate her materiel with alternate implements of expression, what will be the advantage for her?

Can we imagine a new open space, alongside the books, the articles, and the bibliography, where students and anthropologists could produce completely new queer objects? I work on different possibilities of modeling and simulation, which gives me access to a new apodictic aesthetic, an aesthetic that demonstrates as much as it visualizes, and enables me to develop new forms of representation that are essential for the development of our anthropological practice.

This project has no intention of eliminating the writing process or establishing value comparisons between writing and new media, but rather seeks to open a space for new ways of expression. We seek to establish the various methodologies intrinsic to any discipline wanting to share its acquired knowledge. Most of the time visual anthropology does not offer a set of answers, but rather lays down a basis for research, and identifies some of the questions raised by the filmed image.

In this frenetic quest for knowledge, I feel it is essential to be able to integrate new methods, as a non-exclusive phase in the construction of a discipline. With the arrival of digital media, production methods are diversifying; since technological evolution is often followed by an evolution in working practices. Let us hope that visual anthropology will retain its capacity for renewal in the coming years.

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